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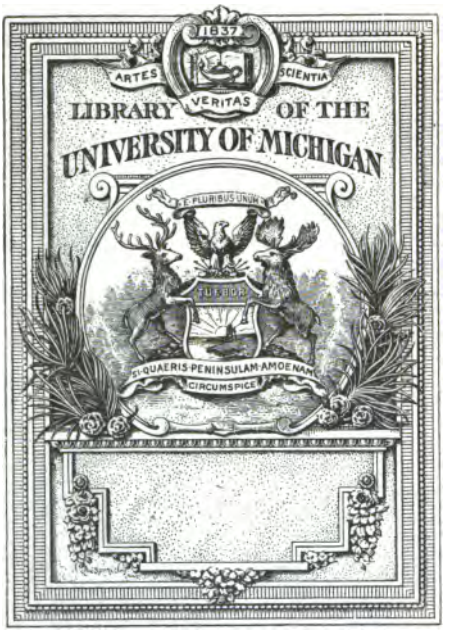
The American Short Story

Smith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THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY

BY

C. ALPHONSO SMITH

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PREFACE

The following pages contain one of the lectures on American literature delivered at the University of Berlin during the author's incumbency of the Roosevelt Professorship from 1910 to 1911. It was published in English in the *Internationale Wochenschrift für Kunst und Technik* (Berlin, December 17, 1910) and forms Chapter XVI in the author's *Amerikanische Literatur* (Berlin, 1912). No changes have been made in the text.

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February 14, 1912

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THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY

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A few years ago lectures on American literature meant lectures on American authors or on distinctive periods in the literary history of America. The unit was the individual author or the definitely bounded period. To these two methods of approach, however, a third has been added: it is the study of literary types, especially of prose types. An example is seen in Theodore Stanton's "Manual of American Literature" (1909), which is the four thousandth volume of the Tauchnitz Edition. This, I believe, is the only formal history of American literature which not only discusses periods and authors but groups the latter under such headings as The Historians, The Novelists, The Poets, etc. The same method is followed in "The Wampum Library of American Literature,"

only three volumes of which have appeared.[1] This Library "has been planned," says the editor, Brander Matthews, "to include a series of uniform volumes, each of which shall deal with the development of a single literary species, tracing the evolution of this definite form here in the United States, and presenting in chronological sequence typical examples chosen from the writings of American authors. The editors of the several volumes provide critical introductions, in which they outline the history of the form as it has been evolved in the literature of the world."

The reason for this growing attention to literary types is to be sought chiefly in the rise and development of the American short story. The study of this type has led to the study of other types. More has been written, however, in the last ten years about the American short story than about all other types combined; for in the short story, if anywhere, American writers have evolved a new *genre*, as distinct from the novel as the ballad is distinct from the longer epic.

[1] These are "American Short Stories," "American Literary Criticism," and "American Familiar Verse (Vers de Société)."

THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY

As long ago as 1886 Anton E. Schönbach[1] called attention to the American short story in these words:

Eine Spezialität der amerikanischen Erzählungsliteratur ist die kurze Geschichte, Novellette, die eine der beliebtesten Gaben der Monatsschriften geworden ist. Sie unterscheidet sich sehr von dem, was man in England short stories nennt, in Deutschland ist sie fast unbekannt. Denn die Geschichtchen, welche seinerzeit in der "Illustrierten Welt," in Payne's "Familienblatt," im "Österreichischen Lloyd" und sonst in Stuttgarter, Leipziger (jetzt besonders in der "Illustrierten Zeitung"), Berliner Zeitschriften geboten wurden, gehörten einer niedrigen Gattung an, enthielten Abenteuer, Aufregung und Schrecken, Kriminalistisches. Am nächsten kommen in der Form einige kleine Sachen von Adalbert Stifter, von Lentner, von Theodor Fontane, und besonders von Rosegger. Aber im wesentlichen ist doch diese amerikanische short story etwas ganz Eigenartiges. Unsere Novellen sind viel umfangreicher und häufig nur kondensierte Romane, indem sie das Vorher und Nachher eines entscheidenden Vorganges im Leben ihrer Gestalten mit vorbringen. Die kurze Magazingeschichte der Amerikaner ist gegenwärtig meistens ein kleines realistisches Lebensbild: ein Ausschnitt aus einem wirklichen Stück Leben, ein einzelner, oft an sich unbedeutender, aber

[1] *Deutsche Rundschau*, März bis Mai. See Schönbach's "Gesammelte Aufsätze" (Graz, 1900), S. 417.

charakteristischer Vorfall wird beschrieben, oft wiederum nur eine mit etlichen Figuren staffierte Landschaft. Was man von dieser Gattung verlangt, ist Stimmung; es kommt daher alles auf den Erzähler selbst an, der aus der Menge kleiner, scharf beobachteter Züge den poetischen Eindruck gewinnt und ungeschädigt darstellt. Am ehesten lässt sich damit die Stimmungslandschaft der modernen Malerei vergleichen, die ja gar nicht mehr komponiert wird, wie man früher pflegte, sondern durchaus den Charakter der Studie besitzt und bei sorgfältiger Ausführung der Einzelheiten doch auch die Essenz einer gewissen Stimmung wiedergibt; der Münchener Neubert versteht sich darauf vortrefflich. Innerhalb des Rahmens der kurzen Geschichte haben natürlich viele besondere Arten Platz. Für alle gibt es ältere Vorgänger.

The expression "short story," it should be said, has been gradually undergoing a change of meaning. To most readers it is still a vague expression, like the German "Novelle"[1] and the French "nouvelle" and "conte." Indeed it was not till recent years that American critics, following the lead of Poe, began to regard the short story as fundamentally different from

[1] See Edwin Rohde, "Verhandlungen der dreissigsten Versammlung Deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner in Rostock" (Leipzig, 1876), S. 58.

the novel and from the story that is merely short. The most important recent work on the subject is a little treatise by Brander Matthews called "The Philosophy of the Short-story"[1] (1901). Matthews, though recognizing Poe as the founder of the American short story, thinks that he himself was the "first to assert that the short story differs from the novel essentially and not merely in the matter of length." He summarizes the difference as follows:[2] "No one has ever succeeded as a writer of Short-stories who had not ingenuity, originality, and compression; and most of those who have succeeded in this line had also the touch of fantasy. But there are not a few successful novelists lacking not only in fantasy and compression but also in ingenuity and originality; they had other qualities, no doubt, but these they had not." He cites Anthony Trollope as an example. To make his distinction visible to the eye as well as to the mind, Matthews writes "short story" with a capital and hyphen (Short-story).

[1] The substance of Mr. Matthews's views appeared first "in the columns of the *Saturday Review* of London in the summer of 1884."

[2] "The Philosophy of the Short-story," p. 23.

The distinction, however, between the novel and the short story was expressed far more clearly by Friedrich Spielhagen as early as 1876.[1]

Der Unterschied zwischen Novelle und Roman hat den Ästhetikern schon viel Kopfzerbrechen verursacht. Indessen man hat sich im ganzen und grossen doch geeinigt und braucht keinen erheblichen Widerspruch zu fürchten, wenn man jenen Unterschied ungefähr so charakterisiert: die Novelle hat es mit fertigen Charakteren zu tun, die durch eine besondere Verkettung der Umstände und Verhältnisse in einen interessanten Konflikt gebracht werden, wodurch sie gezwungen sind, sich in ihrer allereigensten Natur zu offenbaren, also, dass der Konflikt, der sonst Gott weiss wie hätte verlaufen können, gerade diesen, durch die Eigentümlichkeit der engagierten Charaktere bedingten und schlechterdings keinen anderen Ausgang nehmen kann und muss. Fügen wir noch hinzu, dass in der älteren Novelle "die besondere Verkettung der Umstände und Verhältnisse" präponderiert, in der neueren dagegen, der modernen Empfindung gemäss, der Hauptakzent auf die "Eigentümlichkeit der engagierten Charaktere" fällt,

[1] Novelle oder Roman? (in "Beiträge zur Theorie und Technik des Romans"). Spielhagen's first sentence implies an abundant literature on the subject. See also K. W. F. Solger's "Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik" (1829). For more recent discussions see Bibliographie zur Technik des neueren deutschen Romans, by Charles H. Handschin (*Modern Language Notes*, Baltimore, Dec. 1909, Jan. 1910).

so haben wir, glaube ich, so ziemlich beisammen, was die Novelle hinreichend scharf von dem Romane scheidet. . . . So gleicht die Novelle einem Multiplikationsexempel, in welchem mit wenigen Faktoren rasch ein sicheres Produkt herausgerechnet wird; der Roman einer Addition, deren Summe zu gewinnen, wegen der langen Reihe und der verschiedenen Grösse der Summanden, umständlich und im ganzen etwas unsicher ist. Deshalb hat auch die Novelle sowohl in ihrem Endzweck als in ihrer künstlerischen Ökonomie eine entschiedene Ähnlichkeit mit dem Drama, während der Roman (und nichts ist vielleicht bezeichnender für den tiefen Unterschied zwischen Novelle und Roman) in jeder Beziehung des Stoffes, der Ökonomie, der Mittel, ja selbst, subjektiv, in Hinsicht der Qualität der poetischen Phantasie und dichterischen Begabung, der volle Gegensatz des Dramas ist.

Spielhagen has here made the distinction between the "Novelle" and the "Roman" to depend not on comparative length but on structure, and this is exactly the distinction made by Matthews. Poe, however, went still further; he, too, put the emphasis on structure, but he made the very essence of the short story to consist in the production of a predetermined effect. Structure, as he viewed it, was merely a means to this end. "Before you set about constructing your

short story," Poe says in substance, "determine on exactly the effect that you wish to produce; then choose your means, then adapt your structure, solely with this end in view." In the following oft-quoted paragraph[1] Poe presents his formula for the short story with his usual clearness and precision: "A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents — he then combines such events — as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preëstablished design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art,

[1] See his review of Hawthorne's "Twice-Told Tales" (*Graham's Magazine*, May, 1842); Virginia Edition (1902), Vol. XI, p. 108.

a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel."

Judged by the amount of comment that it has evoked, and by the probable influence that it has exerted on the development of the American short story, the paragraph just quoted is easily the most important piece of critical writing in American literature. Every discussion of the American short story is apt to begin or to end with it. Poe himself must have felt that he had made a significant contribution to the technique of the short story, — or, as he called it, the tale, — for he repeats his views in many other passages. It will be seen that he places the emphasis on unity, on compression, or, as he preferred to call it, on "totality of effect." This is the quality above all that distinguished his own work, whether in prose or in verse. It is also the quality that has given distinction to the American short story as a separate literary *genre*. It is, moreover, the criterion by which the novel is distinguished from the short story, and the short story from the story that is merely short.

The four writers who have done most to give the American short story its present-day rank are, in chronological order, Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, and Bret Harte. It is worthy of note that these writers almost without exception called their brief narratives "tales" or "sketches," not short stories. The term "short story," therefore, is of very modern origin; the thing itself, however, goes back at least as far as 1835, the date of Poe's "Berenice." In this lecture I shall use the term "short story" both in its technical and untechnical sense; that is, as designating the brief, compact, intense, and highly unified story as written by Poe and Bret Harte, and as designating the looser and more leisurely story as written by Irving and not infrequently by Hawthorne.

It has already been said[1] that Irving, in "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," inaugurated a distinctive type of short story, the short story of local color. This has been called, since 1870, the "garden-patch" type of story, because in it each writer may be said to cultivate his own garden, or rather his own "patch" in the national garden.

[1] Lecture on Irving.

Judged by the strict demands of structure, as outlined by Poe, both "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" are tales rather than short stories. If Poe had written "Rip Van Winkle," he would have inverted the sequence of the story. He would have begun with Rip's return from the mountain. He would have directed the reader's attention, first of all, to the mysterious problem presented by the sudden emergence of a stranger who did not know that the Revolutionary War had been fought. Then, when the mystery seemed almost insoluble, he would have introduced this passage: "All stood amazed, until an old woman, tottering out from among the crowd, put her hand to her brow, and peering under it into his face for a moment, exclaimed: 'Sure enough! It is Rip Van Winkle — it is himself! Welcome home again, old neighbor. Why, where have you been these twenty long years?'" This passage would have occurred about the middle of the story, instead of two pages from the end, and would have been followed by a detailed explanation of the mystery.

The story would thus have gained in intensity of interest, in artistic unity, and in economy of details;

but it would certainly have lost something of the charming humor that irradiates it and much of the accuracy of milieu that gives distinction to it as a specific type of short story. Under Poe's treatment Rip would have ceased to be a clearly defined character and would have become a mere symbol of the past. In other words, "Rip Van Winkle" is a proof that the old-fashioned tale may appeal to as many readers, may indeed be as well told in its way, as the short story with the hyphen. In every form of literature the author's personality must be taken into consideration. A story, therefore, may vary widely from Poe's standard, but exhibit nevertheless excellence of structure and even unity of structure, not by the handling of the plot, but by the perfect blending of the author's personality and his style. "Die Hauptvorzüge der Irvingschen Schriften," says a recent critic,[1] "beruhen auf ihrer einfachen Natürlichkeit, der vortrefflichen Beobachtungsgabe, ihrem liebenswürdigen Humor und dem edlen, geradezu klassischen Stile." These qualities, it may be added,

[1] Professor Dr. F. Meyer, "Selection of American Prose-Writers" (Freytags Sammlung, Leipzig, 1909), Einleitung, S. 5.

will give distinction to any type of literature, whatever be its purely technical defects.

Irving's best stories are found in "The Sketch-Book" (1819–1820), "Bracebridge Hall" (1822), "The Tales of a Traveller" (1824), and "The Alhambra" (1832). Though these stories cover a wide range of history and legend, the form varies but little, and this form is an evolution from, rather than an imitation of, "The Spectator" of Addison and Steele. "The Spectator" is a collection of essays and character sketches. Out of the character sketches came ultimately not only the first form of the American short story but also the English novel of Richardson and Fielding.[1] "Sir Roger de Coverley," for example, is a typical character sketch. But "Rip Van Winkle" is more than a character sketch; it is a character sketch in the moment of transition into a short story. It is a sketch in its wealth of description, in its skillful portrayal of character, and in the leisurely movement of its style; it is a short story in its narrative continuity, in its interweaving of

[1] See Wilbur L. Cross's "The Development of the English Novel" (1909), p. 25.

character with incident, and in its steady progress toward a culminating *dénouement.*

By 1833 Irving had written his best stories and was planning larger works. In the same year Poe published his "MS. found in a Bottle" and won by it a hundred-dollar prize. It was in "Berenice," however, written two years later, that Poe first showed the mastery of technique that was to make him the founder of the new *genre.* In June of the same year — Poe's story having appeared in March — Hawthorne published "The Ambitious Guest." Both stories are thoroughly characteristic of their authors, and may well serve as the basis for a comparison of their respective methods of workmanship. Poe's story moves to its conclusion as undeviatingly as a bullet to its target. There is one dominating impression to be produced, and every incident, every explanation, every sentence, every word contributes directly and cumulatively to the end in view. Plot, atmosphere, style are fused into perfect unity. The first paragraph presupposes, but does not reveal, the last, as the last presupposes and completes the first. The reader is told nothing which he may infer for

himself, but enough is told to make his inference inevitable. The theme of the story is that particular form of monomania induced by concentration upon one idea until that idea becomes an obsession: "This monomania, if I must so term it, consisted in a morbid irritability of those properties of the mind in metaphysical science termed the *attentive*. It is more than probable that I am not understood; but I fear, indeed, that it is in no manner possible to convey to the mind of the merely general reader an adequate idea of that nervous *intensity of interest* with which, in my case, the powers of meditation (not to speak technically) busied and buried themselves in the contemplation of even the most ordinary objects of the universe."

Hawthorne's theme in "The Ambitious Guest" is the futility of a noble ambition, but this theme is not allowed to suggest itself; it is introduced into the conversations of all the eight characters. Even the children, who had been put to bed in another room, "seemed to have caught the infection from the fireside circle, and were outvying each other in wild wishes, and childish projects of what they would do when they came to be men and women."

Not content with this, Hawthorne adds a few comments at the end, exactly as would be done in a formal sermon: "Woe for the high-souled youth, with his dream of Earthly Immortality! His name and person utterly unknown; his history, his way of life, his plans, a mystery never to be solved, his death and his existence equally a doubt!"

Poe, even in his earliest stories, is never guilty of adding what did not need to be added. Of the art of knowing when to stop — perhaps the rarest of all arts — he was a consummate master. It was an art implied in his theory of what the short story should be. This theory had reference also to poetry as well as to prose, and Poe's poems may serve equally as illustrations of his technique. That Hawthorne blundered frequently here will be evident to any one who will glance at the concluding parts of such otherwise excellent short stories as "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," "The Vision of the Fountain," "Prophetic Pictures," "David Swan," "The Threefold Destiny," and "The Birthmark."[1] It is probable that some of

[1] Hawthorne's interest in the elixir of life and in the problems suggested by it may be traced not only in "The Birthmark,"

these inartistic endings may find their explanation in a remark that Hawthorne once made about his story called "Rappacini's Daughter." "I did not know," he said, "while writing it, how it would end."

In the beginning of his stories as well as at the end Hawthorne also at times differs widely from Poe. The story called "Wakefield" (1835) is an example. In the first paragraph the entire plot is sketched in advance. The story is of a man who left his home and wife, but took lodgings in a house just across the street. For twenty years he saw his wife only at a distance, she in the meanwhile thinking him dead. At the end of twenty years he returned to his home as quietly as he had left it. The story as Hawthorne tells it in twelve pages is not so much a story as a study of a given situation. "If the reader choose," says Hawthorne, "let him do his own meditation; or if he prefer to ramble

but in "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," "A Virtuoso's Collection," "The Great Carbuncle," "Septimius Felton," "The Dolliver Romance," and "A Select Party." Compare also William Godwin's novel, "St. Leon" (1799), a story of the misery which an alchemist had to endure from the possession of the elixir of life; and Hoffmann's "Elixiere des Teufels."

with me through the twenty years of Wakefield's vagary, I bid him welcome." Hawthorne has thus deliberately deprived the story of the interest of unexpectedness. What interest it has is due not to skillful concealment of the final issue, but to the author's interpretation of the character of a man who would play such a joke on an innocent wife. The story resembles the Greek tragedies, in which the audience knew beforehand *what* would happen, but were interested none the less in *how* it would happen. Had Poe told the story, he would have kept the reader in suspense as to Wakefield's return until the last paragraph.[1]

In still other respects the short stories of Hawthorne and Poe stand far apart. Hawthorne appeals primarily to the conscience. He was a descendant of Puritans, and the problems of conscience were the problems in which they were chiefly interested. Poe enters this realm rarely. His "William Wilson,"

[1] Poe, it is true, praises "Wakefield," but not for its structure. "The force of Mr. Hawthorne's tale," he says, "lies in the analysis of the motives which must or might have impelled the husband to such folly." See his review of Hawthorne's "Twice-Told Tales" (*Graham's Magazine*, May, 1842).

however, that profound study of good and evil fighting for supremacy in a single soul, is evidence that Poe could treat moral themes in a masterly way when he chose. But he did not believe that the chief end of art was to inculcate morality. Then, again, Hawthorne's imagination, far more than Poe's, demanded some physical image, some concrete symbol, as a center for its activities. He is indeed the greatest of symbolists. In his "Twice-Told Tales" the word "symbol" occurs twenty-five times, the word "emblem" twenty times. Among his favorite symbols may be mentioned a shroud, a black veil, a carbuncle, a snake, a mantle, a butterfly, a cross, and a scarlet letter. The latter, which he used with such telling effect in the great novel of that name, had been already employed by him as a symbol of sin in the short story called "Endicott and the Red Cross" (1838). No other symbol ever exercised so potent a spell over his imagination as this. Indeed in one passage of "The Scarlet Letter," the passage in which the scarlet letter is made to appear suddenly in the sky, the reader feels that what was intended as a climax is really an anticlimax.

Poe's contribution to the American short story was not in the direction of symbolism or of supernaturalism, though he employed both. Still less is it to be sought in a more accurate use of local color, for local color owes nothing to Poe. His contribution lay in a more perfect form, a more artistic technique. In his formula for the short story, which we have already cited, Poe laid down principles which could be employed with equal effect, whatever the theme or thought content of the story might be. It might be a story of conscience, a mere sketch, an episode, a character study, the portrayal of an interesting situation, a bit of tragedy, or a humorous anecdote. Poe said nothing about theme; his advice was, "Drive straight to the point, whatever your theme."

As a matter of fact, his own stories have been divided by the critics into many classes. But from the point of view of structure, they fall into only two classes. "Berenice" (1835) is, in point of time, his first masterpiece of the first class; "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), his first masterpiece of the second class. In the first there is an unbroken cumulative movement from the first paragraph to the last;

in the second the mystery deepens in the first half and is completely solved in the second half. The first type may be represented by a capital A: the lines of interest converge and culminate at the apex; the second type may be represented by a capital B: the story, in other words, is divided into two equal and corresponding sections or semicircles. To the latter class belongs the detective story, of which Poe is justly considered the founder.[1] Stories of this kind appeal primarily to our intellectual curiosity, to our puzzle-solving instinct. The stories of the A type appeal more to our art sense — to our feeling for unity, for harmony, for climax. In both there is perfect "totality of effect," but it is obtained in different ways. In stories of the A type there is no break either in kind or degree of interest. In stories of the

[1] "Edgar Allan Poe ist, wie es scheint, der Erfinder des wirksamen Erzählerkniffs, sowie er auch der Vorläufer Conan Doyles in der Schöpfung der Detektivgeschichte geworden ist. Die Novelle vom 'Goldkäfer' ist das Vorbild zahlloser Nachahmer geworden. 'Die Mordtaten in der Rue Morgue' enthalten im Keime bereits alle Elemente, aus denen die moderne Detektivnovelle von der Art der Sherlock Holmes-Serie besteht" ("Die Englische Literatur im Zeitalter der Königin Viktoria," von Leon Kellner (Leipzig, 1909), S. 23).

B type there is a cæsural pause in the middle, but this pause does not separate the two half-lines, — if we may continue our metrical figure, — but only binds them into closer harmony.

In 1849 Poe died, and Hawthorne turned from short stories to novels. From now on, till the rise of Bret Harte, few short stories of real merit were written. Two, however, deserve consideration. These are "What was it?" (1859), by Fitz-James O'Brien; and "The Man without a Country" (1863), by Edward Everett Hale. The conception of "What was it?" would have delighted Poe's soul, though he would have improved the technique. As it stands, however, it is the best short story written in the Poe manner that the last half century can boast. The mysterious object in the story could be felt, heard, measured, and weighed, but not seen. "I cannot even attempt," says the narrator, "to give any definition of my sensations the instant after I turned on the gas. . . . I saw nothing! Yes; I had one arm firmly clasped round a breathing, panting, corporeal shape; my other hand gripped with all its strength a throat as warm, and apparently as fleshy, as my own; and yet,

with this living substance in my grasp, with its body pressed against my own, and all in the bright glare of a large jet of gas, I absolutely beheld nothing! Not even an outline, a vapor!" When the creature died a plaster cast was taken of it. "It was shaped like a man — distorted, uncouth, and horrible, but still a man. It was small, not over four feet and some inches in height, and its limbs revealed a muscular development that was unparalleled. Its face surpassed in hideousness anything I had ever seen."

The story has undoubted originality and is admirably told. Matthews[1] thinks Poe would not have condescended to the prosaic plaster cast at the end. But why not? The taking of the cast merely emphasized the qualities that the creature was known to possess. One may venture the opinion, however, that Poe would have gone more deeply into the real nature of such a monster, and would at least have suggested an explanation of its origin.

[1] "The Short-Story: Specimens illustrating its Development" (New York, 1907), by Brander Matthews, p. 246. "O'Brien's story," says Matthews, "seems to have suggested to Guy de Maupassant his even more powerful 'Le Horla.'"

"The Man without a Country" owes its popularity not so much to a skillful plot — there is really no plot — as to a rarely suggestive situation, firmly grasped and intelligently worked out. It was written during the Civil War for the express purpose of stimulating patriotism. Philip Nolan, lieutenant in the United States Army, said with an oath that he hoped never to hear of the United States again. "The court sentenced him to have his wish fulfilled." This is the whole story, or rather this is the situation which Dr. Hale has developed. It is in fact a Hawthorne story, just as "What was it?" is a Poe story. The question with Dr. Hale was not, "How may I tell an interesting story?" but, "How may I develop all the potentialities of an interesting situation?"

This, it may be said in passing, is the method of Henry James, except that his situations are frequently not interesting. In a recent story, "The Beldonald Holbein," [1] James says, "It is not my fault if I am so put together as often to find more life in situations obscure and subject to interpretation than in the gross rattle of the foreground." One could not find a more

[1] See "The Better Sort" (New York, 1903).

luminous comment upon his short stories than these words contain. The situations that he prefers are, as he says, "obscure" but "subject to interpretation." Hawthorne's situations, however, even when obscure, are always vital. We cannot imagine Hawthorne saying, as James says,[1] "It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way." No, this is not an incident; if it be anything, it is a situation, and a very trivial and anæmic one at that. Hawthorne, in a word, deals with primary emotions, James with secondary emotions.

After "The Man without a Country" the next great American short story to appear was "The Luck of Roaring Camp." It was published in 1868, but appeared in book form in 1870 with "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" and "Tennessee's Partner." In these stories Bret Harte did more than any one else to give the American short story immediate recognition as a new *genre* both at home and abroad. Had he written nothing else his fame would be secure. He continued, however, to write short stories of

[1] See his "Art of Fiction."

California life until his death in 1902, but he never surpassed the three stories just mentioned.

Bret Harte's early models were Irving and Dickens. As early as 1863 he contributed to *The Atlantic Monthly* a story called "The Legend of Monte del Diablo," which shows in every paragraph the influence of Irving's pictures of Spanish life. His poem entitled "Dickens in Camp" would seem to show that what he most admired at first in Dickens was his sentimentality. By 1868, however, he had found his own style, a style that owed little to Dickens and less to Irving; sentimentality had given place to realism, though Bret Harte's realism was never of the uncompromising type; it was realism in the service of idealism. Fortunately the greatest short-story writers in American literature have put on record a statement of the principles that guided them in the structure of their narratives. Bret Harte is no exception. In an article entitled "The Rise of the Short Story"[1] he declares that though Poe, Hawthorne, and Longfellow[2]

[1] Published in *The Cornhill Magazine*, July, 1899.

[2] He had in mind Longfellow's "Tales of a Wayside Inn," only three of which deal with American history.

wrote excellent short stories, their work did not indicate sufficient knowledge of American geography, was not American enough. The Civil War, he says, had fused the North, the South, the East, and the West into one great nation, but only Edward Everett Hale, in "The Man without a Country," had realized this fact; California, in the days of the forty-niners, was a great melting pot in which the diverse elements of American life had already, before the sixties, begun to assume unity and homogeneity; realizing the opportunity before him, he had written "The Luck of Roaring Camp."

He sums up his views as follows: "The secret of the American short story is the treatment of characteristic American life, with absolute knowledge of its peculiarities and sympathy with its methods; with no fastidious ignoring of its habitual expression, or the inchoate poetry that may be found hidden even in its slang; with no moral determination except that which may be the legitimate outcome of the story itself; with no more elimination than may be necessary for the artistic conception, and never from the fear of the fetish of conventionalism. Of such is the

American short story of to-day, the germ of American literature to come."

Bret Harte, then, consciously created a new kind of short story. His purpose, as he himself stated it, was to found "a distinctive Western American literature." And yet an examination of his stories makes it evident that they are distinctive not so much in structure as in locale. He opened a new field to American literature but he exemplified no new principle of art. His technique at its best is that of Poe; indeed, he was the first to show that Poe's technique would serve as well for stories told objectively as for stories told subjectively. Poe's milieu, it is true, is an imaginary milieu, while Bret Harte's is definite and American. But the art of making the milieu an essential factor in the story is displayed as clearly in "The Fall of the House of Usher" as in "The Outcasts of Poker Flat."

Bret Harte's method of character portrayal is by no means complicated. It was once remarked by Samuel Taylor Coleridge that both good and bad men are less so than they seem. Bret Harte undoubtedly believed that this was true of bad men; they were

not so bad, in his mind, as society regarded them. Like Mark Twain, he was always on the side of the individual and against the institution, whether social, civil, or religious. He sought to prove that vice,

> "Like the toad, ugly and venomous,
> Wears yet a precious jewel in his head."

His characteristic method is to show that those whom society treats as outcasts have yet some redeeming virtue that puts to shame their censors. When he was criticized for confusing the boundary lines of virtue and vice, he replied that his stories "conformed to the rules laid down by a Great Poet who created the parable of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan."

The reply can hardly be called a happy one, for Bret Harte's method is the antithesis of that of Christ. It is true that he does not make vice attractive; he makes virtue attractive; but he does so by uniting it to a reputation for evil. When Bret Harte introduces us to a thief, or murderer, or harlot, we know at once that the thief will turn out to be a hero in disguise, the murderer a model of manliness, the harlot a paragon of unselfishness. In fact, noble qualities are

attractive in Bret Harte's pages, not because of what they are in themselves, but because of the contrast between them and the vessel in which they are contained. Christ shows us the prodigal son eating with swine; Bret Harte would have sketched him leaning gracefully against the side of the pigpen, wiping the dust from his shoes with a silk handkerchief, and surveying scornfully the scene before him.

As to Bret Harte's humor, it is of a kind that had already found partial expression in the South. In fact, wherever in American history two distinct grades of civilization, a higher and a lower, have come into contact with one another, — wherever there has been a borderland, — humor has been one of the results. Mark Twain portrayed the humor of the Southwest when the Southwest was the meeting place of a receding and an advancing society. The same conditions prevailed in the South a generation earlier and found humorous expression in "Georgia Scenes" (1836),[1]

[1] This book enjoys the rare distinction of having made Poe laugh and laugh uproariously. "Seldom," he said, "perhaps never in our lives, have we laughed as immoderately over any book as over the one now before us." See the Virginia Edition (1902), Vol. VIII, p. 258.

by Augustus Baldwin Longstreet; in "Major Jones's Courtship" (1840), by William Tappan Thompson; in "The Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs" (1846), by Johnson Jones Hooper; and in "Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi" (1853), by Joseph Glover Baldwin.

"Since 1870," as was said in a former lecture, "our best writers are those who have reproduced the scenery and the characters that they knew and loved best." In 1892 Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson[1] declared that "the rapid multiplication of the portable kodak had scarcely surpassed the swift growth of local writers, each apparently having the same equipment of directness and vigor." Writing only a few months ago, William Dean Howells[2] expressed himself as follows: "In the extraordinary development of local literature among us, ever since the Pacific Slope began to express itself in the peculiar colors and cadences of its romances and poets, we have to confess an apparent divinity in the

[1] See "The Local Short Story" (*The Independent*, New York, March 11).

[2] See his review of "Mr. Harben's Georgia Fiction" (*The North American Review*, March, 1910).

geographical distribution of American authorship.... In this sort of work there has seemed to me the highest promise of a national literature; and in the devotion, the æsthetic patriotism, if I may reach out for a meaning rather beyond the phrase, I have read the prophecy of something finely and finally American. If the reader will try to think what the state of polite learning (as they used to call it in the eighteenth century) would now be among us, if each of our authors had studied to ignore, as they have each studied to recognize, the value of the character and tradition nearest about them, I believe he will agree with me that we owe everything that we now are in literature to their instinct of vicinage."

Most of the short-story writers who rose to prominence after 1870 have been mentioned in a former lecture. To the list should be added Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins (since 1902 Mrs. Charles M. Freeman), and William Sidney Porter, better known as O. Henry. The death of Sarah Orne Jewett in 1909 removed a writer who for thirty years had been a sort of mediator between the country people and the city people of the New England States.

"When I began to write," she once said, — that is, in 1877, — "city people and country people were a little suspicious of each other; and, more than that, the only New Englander generally recognized in literature was the caricatured Yankee." She wrote of New England country people just as they were, and thirty years ago the field was a comparatively new one. She was born in Maine and her best stories are found in "The Country of the Pointed Firs" (1896), this being another name for her native state. All of her stories show an accurate knowledge of local character and dialect, a gentle and sympathetic humor, and a style of rare purity and distinction.

Mary E. Wilkins, who is usually grouped with Sarah Orne Jewett, presents, however, the more somber side of New England life. Her characters are usually abnormal, or at least obsessed by some fixed idea. Her first notable volume, "A Humble Remonstrance" (1887), contains twenty-eight short stories and sketches of life in a Massachusetts village There is genuine pathos in these stories; and in her next volume, "A New England Nun and Other Stories" (1891), pathos is reënforced by humor.

There is an element of monotony, however, in her work, due partly to sameness of milieu and partly to the narrow range of emotions that her characters illustrate. The influence of Hawthorne is plainly traceable in many of her stories,[1] while that of Harriet Beecher Stowe[2] is equally evident in the work of Sarah Orne Jewett.

The third writer, William Sidney Porter,[3] has been called "the American Maupassant," "the apostle of the picaresque," "the discoverer of the romance of New York's streets," "the Homer of the tenderloin," and "the Bret Harte of the city." His contact with the different phases of American life was almost as varied as that of Mark Twain. Born in Greensboro, North Carolina, at the close of the Civil War, he moved in boyhood to Texas, where he lived on a cattle ranch. He then became an editor

[1] See especially "Silence and Other Stories" (1898).

[2] I have reference especially to "Oldtown Folks" (1869).

[3] For appraisals of O. Henry, see *The Bookman* (New York, April, 1910); *The New York Times* (June 6, 1910); *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung* (June 6, 1910); *The Evening Post* (New York, June 6, 1910); and *The Outlook* (New York, June 18, 1910). The best sketch of his boyhood is in *The Daily Observer* (Charlotte, N. C., August 9, 1908).

in Austin, the capital of Texas. Finding this life monotonous, he moved to Central America and tried raising bananas. On his return he settled in New Orleans and began to write under the nom de plume of O. Henry. In 1902 he moved to New York, where he died on June 5, 1910.

O. Henry will live longest as the short-story historian of New York. He knew the great city — its outer and its inner life, its poetry and its pathos, its humor and its tragedy, its changing moods and whims — as no one else has ever known it. The abundant use of slang, in which he was an adept, will probably bar most of his stories from translation into foreign tongues. But underneath the slang, underneath all that to a careless reader may seem purely local and contemporary, there is a wide sympathy with elemental life in all of its manifestations. "They say," he once remarked, "that I know New York well. Just change Twenty-third Street in one of my New York stories to Main Street, rub out the Flatiron Building and insert Town Hall, and the story will fit any upstate town just as well. So long as a story is true to human nature, all you need to do to make it fit any

town is to change the local color. You can make all the characters of 'The Arabian Nights' parade up and down Broadway." His best short stories are in "The Four Million" (1906), "Heart of the West" (1908), and "The Voice of the City" (1908).

As far as O. Henry may be said to have had a philosophy, it can be expressed in the words in which he outlined the theme of his play, "The World and the Door" (1908): "My purpose is to show that in every human heart there is an innate tendency toward a respectable life; that even those who have fallen to the lowest depths in the social scale would, if they could, get back to the higher life; that the innate propensity of human nature is to choose the good instead of the bad."

Before concluding this lecture I wish to glance at some of the reasons why the short story has played so important a part in American literature. Without attempting to be exhaustive, one may summarize these reasons under four heads:

1. In the first place, there was for a long time no satisfactory copyright law between England and America. Most of the novels read by Americans

were of English authorship. At last, however, American authors, feeling little disposition to compete with Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, and Bulwer in their own field, turned to the short story. Here the demand was great and the supply from English sources by no means equal to the demand. It was to the short story, therefore, that aspiring writers in America devoted their especial attention. In a word, as W. J. Dawson[1] puts it, "The conditions which repressed the short story in England acted powerfully for its benefit in America." It should be added that since the copyright act of 1891 the American writer of short stories is no longer compelled to produce his work in competition with stolen goods.

2. In the second place, the rise and development of the American short story was closely associated with the rise and development of the American magazine. The magazine created a demand which the writers of short stories found it profitable to supply. In the English magazine, however, the serial novel occupied the place of honor until the advent of

[1] "The Modern Short Story" (*The North American Review*, December, 1909).

Stevenson and Kipling. The English magazines now prefer the short story to the continued novel. In his discussion of recent tendencies in English fiction Wülker remarks:[1]

Alle genannten Schriftsteller von Kipling bis Jakobs haben ihre besondere Stärke in der short story, und es scheint, als ob dieses hauptsächlich von amerikanischen Autoren, Edgar Poe, Irving, Hawthorne, Bret Harte, Mark Twain, gepflegte Genre auch von englischen Novellisten neuerdings ganz besonders bevorzugt würde. Der Hauptgrund dafür liegt darin, dass viele englische Zeitschriften und Zeitungen danach streben, ihre Leser möglichst mit Fortsetzungen zu verschonen und ihnen in jeder Nummer einen abgeschlossenen Unterhaltungsstoff zu liefern.

3. Then, again, the very bigness of the United States, the variety of customs and dialects, the presence of the Indian and the negro, the social contrasts, the movement westward, the constant presence of frontier types of character — these offered an opportunity for the new *genre* not found elsewhere. Our short-story writers have done more than our

[1] "Geschichte der englischen Literatur" (Leipzig und Wien, 1907), Band II, S. 343.

poets to show the variety in unity and the unity in variety that have always been characteristic of American life. They have thus helped to bridge the chasm made by the Civil War. They have enabled the different sections to know each other, and with wider knowledge there has come a better understanding and a more intelligent sympathy. When the great American novel comes to be written it will draw largely upon the short story, for it will interpret the local in terms of the national.

4. In the last place, the short story has appealed strongly to the American people because it is short. It has a brief intensity that harmonizes with the national temper. Schönbach,[1] discussing the American tendency to humor, says:

> Man kann, wenn man Lust hat, diese Neigung auf die Natur des Landes zurückführen . . . oder man kann sie auch der nervösen Spannung zuschreiben, die fast zu einem Grundzuge amerikanischen Wesens wird.

The explanation fits equally well the American's fondness for the short story. The average short story consumes about the same length of time that a game

[1] "Gesammelte Aufsätze" (Graz, 1900), S. 364.

of baseball does. It moves, moreover, to its conclusion — it does its work — with an economy of details, with a definiteness of purpose, with an efficiency of means that find a quick response from the average American reader. It was this same preference for brief, intense, and at the same time idealistic literature that made the Americans accord a warmer welcome to Browning's poems than was accorded them elsewhere. Browning's best poems are dramatic monologues, and the dramatic monologue is in poetry what the short story is in prose.

What the future of the short story in America will be can only be conjectured. For myself I cherish the hope that as the short story grew out of the essay, so a national drama may grow out of the short story. "Ein Novellenstoff," says Spielhagen,[1] "ist fast immer zugleich dramatisch; folglich kann beinahe jede Novelle in ein Drama umgedichtet werden." Marion Crawford, it is true, calls the novel "a pocket stage," "a portable drama"; but, as Spielhagen says, the real analogy is not between the drama and the

[1] "Beiträge zur Theorie und Technik des Romans" (Leipzig, 1883), S. 285.

novel but between the drama and the short story. The architecture of the two is singularly alike; "totality of effect" is the watchword in both. Indeed Poe claims to have found the expression "totality of effect" in Schlegel's "Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur." The resemblance between the drama and the short story will at once become apparent if one will read, for example, Lamb's "Tales from the Plays of Shakespeare" and view them not as paraphrases of dramas but as original short stories.

It has always seemed that a national drama ought to have arisen in America between the years 1830 and 1840. This was the period of our first great national awakening — an awakening in literature, in journalism, in industrialism, and in statesmanship. But this awakening was coincident with the rise of sectionalism, a denationalizing influence. When the second awakening came immediately after 1870, the memories of the Civil War were too fresh for the national spirit to embody itself at once in any form of literature. Now, however, all is different. By means of the short story, in which every state of the Union has found representation, the nation has come

to know itself better and to appraise more justly its constituent parts. Sectionalism is dead. Memories of the Civil War serve only to make us realize the greatness of our common country. Each side recognizes the valor and the sincerity of the opposing side, and in this recognition partisanship is lost in patriotism. If ever a nation was ready for a national drama, that nation is America. When it comes, as surely it will come, the short story will have achieved its greatest triumph.

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THEMES FOR INVESTIGATION

1. The Technique of the American Short Story as expounded by the Writers Themselves.[1]

2. Dialect in Bret Harte's Short Stories.[2]

3. A Comparison of the Short Stories of Tieck and Hawthorne.[3]

4. Hidden Treasure as a Motif of the American Short Story.[4]

[1] In addition to the references already given, see Sidney L. Whitcomb's *The Study of a Novel* (New York, 1908), pp. 301–302.

[2] H. C. Merwin, who is writing the life of Bret Harte for the American Men of Letters Series, informs me that he will devote several pages to this subject.

[3] See Poe's Criticism of Hawthorne (Virginia Edition, Vol. XIII, pp. 144–145); Lowell's *Fable for Critics;* Schönbach's *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, S. 345; H. M. Belden's *Poe's Criticism of Hawthorne* (*Anglia*, Vol. XI, pp. 376–404); Jessup and Canby's *Book of the Short Story* (Introduction, pp. 10–12); Canby's *The Short Story in English*, pp. 247–248.

[4] See Irving's *Dolph Heyliger* (in *Bracebridge Hall*) and *The Money-Diggers* (Part IV of *The Tales of a Traveller*); Hawthorne's *Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure* (in *Twice-Told Tales*); Poe's *Gold Bug;* Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (chap. xxv seq.).

5. Double Personality as a Motif of the American Short Story.[1]

6. Poe's Contribution to the Technique of the Short Story.

7. National Characteristics in the American Short Story.

[1] See Poe's *William Wilson; Hoffmann's Elixiere des Teufels and Poe's William Wilson* (chap. iv of Palmer Cobb's *The Influence of E. T. A. Hoffmann on the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe*, 1908); Hawthorne's *Howe's Masquerade;* Mark Twain's *The Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut;* T. B. Aldrich's *Queen of Sheba;* Elizabeth Bisland Wetmore's *The Doppelgänger* (*Library of Southern Literature*, Vol. XIII, pp. 5777–5782); J. E. Poritzky's *Edgar Poe* (*Aus fremden Zungen*, Berlin, 1908, pp. 189–190).

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